



## King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1111/moth.12677](https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12677)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Quash, B. (2021). What Is That To You? A Response to Peter Ochs's *Religion Without Violence*. *Modern Theology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12677>

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# WHAT IS THAT TO YOU?

## A RESPONSE TO PETER OCHS'S *RELIGION WITHOUT VIOLENCE*

---

BEN QUASH

The British artist Tracey Emin's work *For You* is installed above the West Doors inside the Anglican cathedral in Liverpool, UK. The words 'I Felt You And I Knew You Loved me' are written in Emin's own handwriting, spelt out in bright pink neon tubes. It was a risky addition to an imposing Victorian edifice, but it 'converses' creatively with the colour and light of the traditional stained glass window above it, and it has proved successful as a conversation starter among the cathedral's visitors and worshippers. This, I will argue, is because of its peculiar and generative quality of 'vagueness', in the Peircean sense which plays such a central role in Peter Ochs's thought.

In what follows, I will play with the artwork as a way of testing some of the most important claims in Ochs's most recent book, *Religion without Violence*—a book that itself recognizes the importance of play in all human reasoning, though also the immense seriousness of the consequences of such play, for good or ill.

As is appropriate when commenting on a book that is the most extensive and multifaceted articulation to date of Scriptural Reasoning's 'practice and philosophy', I will also engage with a Scriptural passage: the conversation between the resurrected Jesus and Simon Peter as they walk along a beach in the final chapter of John's Gospel (John 21:15–23).

But first, to Ochs himself. At the heart of this remarkable book, which manages to be both modest<sup>1</sup> and ambitious<sup>2</sup> in its claims and proposals, is a section entitled 'Beyond What the Individual Knows'. It is to this section that I want to devote most of my responses, as I find it especially fruitful to think with, amidst fruitfulness galore. Here, Ochs describes how 'while individuals are essential rational agents within SR groups, the reasoning we call SR is irreducible

---

Ben Quash

Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London, Virginia Woolf Building, 22 Kingsway,  
London, WC2B 6NR, UK  
Email: ben.quash@kcl.ac.uk

<sup>1</sup> 'SR fosters modest change in both individualist and anti-individualist habits of learning, resulting, we believe, in new or stronger habits of relational learning' (4).

<sup>2</sup> 'Pragmatism itself needs periodic repair. Here, SR's academic role is of utmost significance, since SR offers an otherwise inevident way of completing Peirce's proof of pragmatism' (144).

to any collection of these agents' contributions' (120). He then outlines eight ways in which knowing can be understood as 'participating' rather than as 'grasping'.

Augustine of Hippo is here (as throughout the book) a key interlocutor, and one of the most influential proponents of a theology of participation in God. But Ochs helpfully warns against modes of participation which become a subsumption of self into God (with a consequent elimination of individual particularity) by drawing a rabbinic analogy:

In the prototypical rabbinic account, the analogue to participation is not identification but intimate relation, through which the human individual or community walks hand in hand with God. (121)

A key part of the wisdom needed to walk this path—'hand in hand with God'—is to be content with 'knowing enough'. This requires a recognition that (1) one has grounds for interpreting Scripture's meanings in a more than arbitrary way; but that (2) this is at the same time necessarily an act of faith or trust (a wager or hypothesis of some sort, on the model of abductive inference); and (3) that even a faithful interpretation which comes to concretion at a given moment of time in the activity of a given interpreter (whether individual or collective) is not definitive for all time and for all interpreters. Scriptures (like Symbols in Peirce's semiotics) give rise to 'a potentially indefinite process of sending and receiving signs in space-time'. 'The individual participates in the chain of transmission but cannot control it' (123). 'Knowing enough' means 'not knowing all'. This is why Ochs commends the positive value of 'not knowing' as a condition of good religious and inter-religious reasoning in the forum of commentary on Scripture.

On this basis, says Ochs, the reading of Scripture must be undertaken repeatedly, with the constant expectation that each new reading is likely to have distinctive interpretative effects. Each verse of Scripture may declare to each reader at a given moment:

'Here I am. This is my meaning here and now. This meaning is how I truly show myself to you at this moment. This truth is a mark of my intimate relationship with you here and now. But it is therefore also a reminder that I may, in another moment, appear to show myself differently to you or to another. This is how I retain my intimacy and thus my truth at each moment that I am carefully read.' (40)

To which, later in the book, he adds: '[t]he gateways of word and text must be entered into anew for each occasion of reading' (86).

At this point, I want to turn properly to Tracey Emin's *For You*, which can be read as also a 'gateway of text'. Its position over an actual door encourages the idea. It is a text designed to be read repeatedly, while its underdetermined referents (a key part of its vagueness) invite speculative hypotheses which may generate different (but potentially valid) associations in successive encounters.

'I Felt You And I Knew You Loved me'. Who is being spoken to? The word 'You' is capitalized in a way that recalls traditional ways of honouring God, but then so is every other word (except—interestingly—the personal pronoun 'me' at the end of the sentence). The words could easily be the speech of romantic or erotic love. Might what we witness in the words of *For You* be the transformation of the language of erotic love to serve the expression of devotion to the divine? There is a long tradition of that, in mystical interpretations of the Song of Songs for example. Or does it permit the peaceful coexistence of both lines of interpretation, without the need to decide for one or the other? Perhaps it speaks of both profane and sacred love simultaneously, in a formula that would sound as natural on one side of the doorway (outside the cathedral) as it

is on the other (in the cathedral's interior). In comparably multivalent fashion, the handwriting reinforces the sense that this is a personal response from a particular human being, yet the words lend themselves to be uttered (and maybe even prayed) by others. Significantly, they occupy a central position in the line of sight of the priest or bishop who, when presiding at the high altar, is in tactile relation with the elements of bread and wine: *feeling* God's presence in a physical as well as an emotional or psychological way. So the statement can with a special intensity qualify and shape the experience of the eucharistic celebrant, alongside the reactions of others who look at it.

Let's look more closely at the first phrase of Emin's sentence: 'I Felt You'. The verb 'to feel' can describe the result of your own action, or the result of someone else's. You can feel someone by reaching out to touch them, as when the woman in the Gospels with unstoppable bleeding reaches out to touch the hem of Jesus's garment (Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:24b–34; Luke 8:42b–48). And you can feel someone because they touch you. Both interpretations are possible here, and this illustrates a key claim in Ochs's discussion of what happens in a 'participating' rather than a 'grasping' relation. The difficulty of determining the primary agent in a relation of feeling invites questions of 'more than individual' actions—actions 'beyond what the individual does'.

In the third of his eight proposals about 'knowing as participating rather than grasping', Ochs appeals to Peirce's logic of relations. Ochs's formal way of stating this logic is  $aRb$ . The relation,  $R$ , does not make one term,  $a$ , the subject of the other,  $b$ —or  $b$  the mere object of  $a$ . It does not represent  $a$ 's 'grasping' of  $b$ , by conforming it to  $a$  in a relation of identity. Nor does it permit  $a$ 's sundering from  $b$  in some allegedly absolute non-identity.<sup>3</sup> It is more truthful to say that  $a$  and  $b$  have sole agency removed from them by the relation  $R$  itself which is shown to have a sort of priority over both. It is something that neither can 'control' (for example, to exclude or assimilate the other) but in which they must both instead participate. (This makes most obvious sense when  $a$  and  $b$  are people, but—as I will suggest below—may also make sense in an extended sense where non-human objects of love and knowledge are concerned.)

If  $R$  represents the relation of knowing, as Ochs goes on to show with the formula  $iKx$ , then 'I do not appear as the subject of knowing (I know  $x$ ) but as a participant with  $x$  of the knowing relation  $K$ '. Likewise, 'if I love  $y$ , I appear as participant with  $y$  of the love relation  $L$ ,  $iLy$ '. The same would be true of having—and so on:

In these terms, participating in the relation of Knowing (or Loving or Having) is knowing (/loving/having) enough:  $a, b, c \dots i$  are finite, but there is no knowing the limit of  $K$  or  $L$  or  $H \dots$  (122)

At the other end of the sentence in Emin's artwork is another phrase which, in light of Ochs's model, we immediately see as susceptible to the same analysis: 'You Loved me'. The double possibility inherent in the verb 'to feel'—which gives the further possibility that this need not be an either/or agency, but a both/and one in which both parties participate—serves an interpretation of this final

<sup>3</sup> I take this 'conforming in a relation of identity' to be what Ochs means by the formula  $a=b$  (in other words, he is saying that you cannot substitute '=' for  $R$ ), and this 'sundering in absolute non-identity' to be what Ochs means by the formula  $a \neq b$  (in other words, he is saying that you cannot replace  $R$  with ' $\neq$ '). The formula  $a=b$  is not suggesting that a knower can be identical with that which is known; rather, it describes a (faulty) presumption that a knower can have complete determinative power over the object of knowledge, such that there is nothing more to the object than what that knower 'makes of it'. But I am not a trained logician, so I register a caution about my interpretation of the symbols  $=$  and  $\neq$  here.

phrase just as well. Love is not the action of one individual upon another. The love relation exceeds the agency of both, and both to varying degrees may participate in it.

Furthermore, this logic of relations offers a further key to the interpretation of Emin's work taken in its entirety, for its encouragement of a non-linear reading of the opening and closing phrases (a reading towards the middle, where the R anchors the participative encounter) can be extrapolated to the full sentence. To illustrate this in another way, with a parallel from the visual arts that may well have been part of Emin's inspiration, you can read the work like a traditional painted triptych (a three-sectioned painting), from the outer 'panels' towards the central one. *For You*, as we have seen, has three units: 'I Felt You'; 'And I Knew'; 'You Loved me'. If you read it like a sentence, the 'I' is the main agent, and 'You Loved Me' becomes the description of something that the 'I' has discovered (or 'grasped'). If you read this work like a triptych—towards the middle—something different happens. The 'I' of 'I Felt You' and the 'You' of 'You Loved me' meet. They meet in a moment of recognition—perhaps even of faith: 'And I Knew'. Or maybe it is even more rich than that, for they have already met, in both the Feeling and the Loving of the outer panels (iFy and yLm). So in the work as a whole these two participative encounters participate in a further one, which is the relation of Knowing. Perhaps, playfully, we could call it fKl. If, for the purpose of the present interpretation, You is interpreted as God, then one can say that (God's-meeting-of-the-creature-in-the-relation-of-love) meets (the-creature's-meeting-of-God-in-the-relation-of-feeling) in the relation of knowing. Feeling and loving culminate in knowing.<sup>4</sup>

A question might be asked at this point. The capacity of 'to feel' to describe both an action *by* me and the effect of the action of someone (or something) *on* me makes it one of a specific group of verbs whose type is often classified as 'ergative'. But 'love' and 'know' do not seem to function in the same grammatical way. Can they all, therefore, equally illustrate the relation R which is participative rather than grasping?

In answer to this imagined objection, I propose something along the lines of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Logos' theology, which asserts an embracing medium in which knowing/loving subjects and the objects of their knowledge/love 'meet'—even when the latter are not human, or even (by conventional modern measures) sentient. For Coleridge, art is an exemplary site of such reciprocal participation. He writes: 'to make the external internal, and the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature—this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts'.<sup>5</sup> The distinction between mind and matter is relativized here, as the divine mind is active in all things, and human minds are in any case irreducibly material. The divine mind, which is light and love, and that by which all things are created and in which all things are held, allows knowledge and love between things. Objects *give* themselves to be known; *offer* themselves to encounters of love. So this relativization of a clear and absolute distinction between subject and object (the sort of distinction which I take  $\neq$  to signify in Ochs's formulations) is at the same time an affirmation of their particularity-in-relation, and of the deeper unity of the world in which such relations are possible.

God, of course, is no worldly object, but for just that reason 'grasping' language displays itself as even less apt, and 'participation' language even more necessary. Paul, who preached about 'feeling after God and finding him' (Acts 17:28) and declared his love for the one who 'loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20) is also the one who looks to the moment when he will 'know [God] fully, even as I am fully known' (1 Corinthians 13:12).

<sup>4</sup> After all, to quote Ochs, 'truly life-sustaining wisdoms must be practiced first before their meanings can be understood' (2).

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'On Poesy or Art', in *Biographia Literaria* Vol. 2, ed. John Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 258.

And at various points in the Gospels, too, relational phrases of the kind that Ochs analyzes in this central section of his book play a significant role. When read in light of Ochs's discussion as invitations to 'participation rather than grasping', these moments take on even greater instructive importance.

For example, in the Farewell Discourses of John's Gospel, Jesus says to his disciples 'if you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14:15). This can be expressed 'if (yLm), you will keep my commandments, and I will give you another Comforter'.

Read triptych-like, with the relation in the middle shifting agency from being the sole prerogative of the 'you', a theological difference of some magnitude is made. Rather than suggesting that some condition must be met by the disciples ('If you love me' read in linear fashion) in order for their obedience to be complete ('you will keep my commandments') and in order for the Paraclete—the Holy Spirit—to be bestowed ('and I will give you another Comforter'), the claim becomes one about the implications of a relation for both parties to that relation. The key emphasis is not on the 'you' as primary agent, but on the flowering of a relationship of 'love' as key condition of what follows. We might paraphrase it as follows: 'If love constitutes the relation between us, then you will keep my commandments and I will give you the Paraclete'.

This is a shift away from what might be characterized as a Pelagian model of 'if you love me' (linear, with agency resting primarily in the creaturely 'you') to an Augustinian one of 'if (yLm)': triptych-like, with the love-relation as prior and constitutive. Certainly, this is compatible with how Augustine interprets the passage in his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*

We are therefore to understand that he who loves already has the Holy Spirit, and by what he has he becomes worthy of a fuller possession, that by having more he may love more. The disciples, therefore, already had that Holy Spirit whom the Lord promised, for without him they could not call him Lord. But [he] was yet to be given them in an ampler measure. (*Tractates on the Gospel of John* 74.1–2).

The superficial problem, he concedes, is that the apostles 'are commanded to love him and keep his commandments before they have received him and, in fact, in order to receive him'. And yet, 'without having that Spirit, they certainly could not love him and keep his commandments'. His solution is to insist that there is an agency at work here that exceeds that of any individual human agent:

The 'relation' of love (equated here with the Spirit) is one whose limit (to use Ochs's words) 'there is no knowing' (122) because it is a relation that can admit new participations in 'a potentially indefinite process' (123)—or, to adapt Augustine's words, 'an ever-ampler measure'.

We turn now to two other examples, which have been read as related to each other in traditional commentary on the Gospels. The first is Simon Peter's denial of Christ, an episode which occurs in all four gospels in slightly different forms (Matthew 26:69–75; Mark 14:66–71; Luke 22:54–60; John 18:15–18; 25–26), and centres on Peter's words 'I do not know him' (uttered three times) when asked if he is an associate of Jesus (who is at that moment on trial in the High Priest's house, following his arrest). The second is Simon Peter's conversation with the risen Jesus on the beach, in which he is asked three times 'do you love me?' and responds three times (on the third occasion with grief) 'you know that I love you'.

The threefold denial of Christ is the suppression of the R-relation in which Peter's identity has gradually come to subsist since his calling as a disciple. It could be described as a refusal to allow the verb 'know' to function as an R. Peter's denial is not just a negation of a specific item of knowledge; it is the negation of a specific participative relationship in knowledge. It therefore



behaves as a form of self-denial as well as denial of the other party to the relation, hence Peter's bitter tears of self-recrimination afterwards.

The subsequent conversation on the beach has consistently been read by Christian exegetes as—in its threefold structure—reparative of Peter's threefold denial. Here the principal R is initially 'love' (though two different Greek words are used in the exchange: *agapeo* and *phileo*). 'Do you love me?' is readable as an offer of love-as-R: an attempt to reconstitute the bond sundered in the earlier denial, rather than to set Peter up as sole agent of a uni-directional act. Peter's response does indeed affirm this love ('I love you') but it does more than this; it extends the iLy relation towards a reconstituted knowledge-relation as well ('*you know* that I love you'). The knowledge-bond was just the one he had denied on the night of Jesus's trial. Here it is repaired as mutual recognition is restored.

After each 'you know that I love you', Jesus also offers an instruction to Peter. Each is a slight variant of the others. 'Feed my lambs' (v.15); 'Tend my sheep' (v.16); 'Feed my sheep' (v.17). As in the earlier example from John 14:15 ('if you love me, you will keep my commandments'), the logic of relations allows this instruction not to be read as a statement that the love Peter is repeatedly professing is conditional on his performance of certain actions (e.g., 'if you really love me you will need to prove it by feeding my sheep'). Rather, it can be read as suggesting that Peter's future pastoral care of the Christian flock will now properly spring from the love and the knowledge which are their repaired bond (the R in which they participate).

Incidentally, the minor variations in Jesus's threefold instruction to Peter can serve as an illustration of Ochs's point that Scripture is a 'gateway' we must enter again and again, and that each entry will never yield precisely the same result. Here (in Christian terms) the incarnate Word speaks to Peter directly, but (even when Peter's words are the same: 'you know that I love you') the responses are subtly varied. (How one might interpret these refined variations is a topic for another time.) This can stand as a sign of how the same scriptural 'Word' can speak diversely as it is engaged repeatedly.

All that I have discussed so far has been focussed on Christian Scriptures and traditions, and (in one case) a work of art in a Christian place of worship. I am not embarrassed about this: one of the blessings of Peter Ochs's work as a Jew is how it helps me understand better how to be a Christian. But I do not want to end this response to his book without some reference to the central issue that it is concerned to address: how religious traditions can relate well without violence. What sorts of R are possible between these traditions and their adherents?

His book's blessing of me is already part of the answer to that. It consists in his pragmatist's diagnosis of the invaluable role that three-valued (or multi-valued) logics can play in defending against, and repairing, the two-valued logics which underlie the dangerous view that I must either *ignore* my neighbour of another religion (on the grounds that we have nothing to connect us), or *eliminate* her (on the grounds that we cannot coexist), or *conform her to my position* (on the grounds that only one of us can be 'right' and it's me). There has always been an element of the ancient 'symposium' about the practice of SR ('[t]here is, prototypically, a table with at least three chairs placed around it' (3), which is just like the Greek *triclinion*), and the symposium's forms of reasoning share with SR study a belief in knowledge 'beyond what the individual knows'. SR's 'mode of reasoning' belongs, says Ochs, 'to a circle of reasoners' as well as to whatever they bring to a particular session of study from 'their various traditions of belief and knowledge' (37). In SR, as in the symposium, the aim is not to come to an agreed statement. In fact, multiple aims are in play: a 'joy' in what is under discussion, and 'a passion to discover everything that may be immanent' in the text or topic; a desire for 'friendship with fellow readers'; a wish to 'listen "over the borders"' of one's established religious or intellectual territory; a search for repair of 'troubled relations'; and a longing (in SR at least) to 'hear God's word more

fully' (42). These aims are achieved by establishing and sustaining a plurality of perspectives and voices, rather than by homogenising them, which incidentally offers an urgent challenge to today's academic disciplines 'to recognize and examine previously overlooked forms of reasoning' (42).<sup>6</sup> The fruits of this 'sympotic' mode of reasoning foster the openness to entertain more than one possibility at once.

As Ochs makes clear, this is not an expression of a wholly relativist perspectivalism. Though wary of universal claims in the context of interreligious dialogue, it seems clear that certain (for want of a better word) 'metaphysical' commitments are at work in Ochs's advocacy of SR. Ochs believes that there is one world: a shared world in which human beings—with their varieties of religious commitments—encounter one another. (Likewise, there may be an irreducible diversity to the points of view that interact in a symposium, but a shared medium is what makes it possible to converse at all.) He also believes that this one world has deep and ultimately trustworthy dynamics, which Scriptures (and perhaps Scriptures alone) disclose. This faith is what must be drawn upon to answer the otherwise disturbing question: 'why value anything rather than nothing?' For the call to repair the world (and to repair human reasonings in order to repair the world) is not self-evidently a call to which all humans will feel they must respond. Yet Ochs does not propose some singular or supposedly neutral epistemological foundation for this metaphysical commitment. He discerns that Peirce's grounds for his Pragmatist's concern with repair lie in Jesus's teachings,<sup>7</sup> and finds his own in the Jewish Scriptures. They are not necessarily free-floating and available to everyone.

Ochs says that 'to serve God who created humanity, to know the creation, and to behold and serve its goodness' is to live out of a relationship with an 'Absolute [. . .] more universal than "universals"' (26). And he argues that religious reasoners, when maturely reasoning, can affirm 'a world that links this entire company of readers to [their] entire set of canons' (29–30). However, perhaps paradoxically, it is precisely a religious reasoner's particular attachment to her tradition's texts that equips her to relinquish her sense of interpretative privilege over them (and requires her to suspend any claim that their interpretation offers an exclusive context for human relationship with the 'Absolute [. . .] more universal than "universals"').

To put it another way, it is on the grounds of *unlimited commitments* to the particularity of one's own tradition and its sacred texts that one has the grounds and the resources for both the constraint and the openness I find I must bring to the claims of others' traditions and sacred texts. As a Christian, I affirm that I *know enough* (on the basis of my belief in Christ, and my adherence to the teachings of Christianity) to affirm that nothing I encounter in the world can be dismissed as outside the realm of divine concern. I must therefore abide with, and attend to, what I know I do *not* know.

I take from Ochs's idea that 'knowing enough' always involves a certain 'not knowing', and that a certain 'not knowing' is a condition of participative relations with God and with each other, that he believes that *humility* and *generosity* are the conditions for the productive exercise of non-binary logics. Ochs is tantalising in not specifying what he thinks the Meta-Interpretant of Scriptural Reasoning is. I would like to know whether he thinks (by analogy with, say, 'the

<sup>6</sup> It is this vision that undergirds the large-scale project I currently direct, which is progressively creating an online 'Visual Commentary on Scripture' (TheVCS.org). The commentary on Scripture is undertaken in the form of an 'conversation' about specific scriptural texts in which groups of three works of art are enlisted as 'conversation partners'. There is no hierarchy within these triads. Precursors of the VCS include Jewish Talmud and Christian *catenae*, as well as the symposium of the ancient world, but in my conceptualization of the VCS I am also profoundly indebted to what I have imbibed from Peter Ochs's thought.

<sup>7</sup> 'Despite Peirce's occasional, naturalist efforts to identify neighbor-love with a cosmic law, I cannot locate any indubitable ground of Peirce's reparative drive other than neighbor-love as a law of the gospel and thus a scriptural imperative.' (138)



rabbinic mind' in intra-Jewish Textual Reasoning (174)) humility and generosity are key markers of the social contexts which license and support SR. (I like the lower case 'm' of Tracey Emin's final 'me' because it seems to express just such humility.)

In any case, and as we have seen, the humble and generous acknowledgement of what we do not know (as well as of the fact that we nevertheless know enough to live faithfully) serve the 'intimate relation, through which the human individual or community walks hand in hand with God'.

This insight of the rabbis suits the participative relation we see being established between Peter and Jesus on the beach at the end of John's Gospel. It is expressive of a unique intimacy. But there is, as we find out immediately afterwards, someone else present:

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!'

Traditionally assumed to be John, the appearance of the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' adds a further dimension to the dialogue between Peter and Jesus. Peter has been in receipt of a divine 'word' (arriving, as we have seen, in a form that is a little different each time—'feed my lambs', 'tend my sheep', 'feed my sheep'). If these variations work as a reminder that divine speech 'lands' a little differently each time it comes to its faithful hearers, nevertheless (and despite this) we also learn that it has definite concrete effects. In this case, Peter is commissioned for a life of service.

In Ochs's terms, this is an example of how the divine word can both 'appear to have not just one but potentially many meanings' (20),<sup>8</sup> and at the same time (in specific, traditioned moments of concrete interpretation) display the Creator's 'imperative voice' (79). What then happens, when Peter notices John following them, is that Peter asks a question of Jesus: *houtos de ti*, which literally means, 'But this one . . . what?'

Patristic authors read Peter's question (piously, in defence of Peter's dignity) as his returning of a favour to John. John had asked a question on Peter's behalf in order to get him access to the High Priest's courtyard shortly before his three denials (John 18:15–16). Now Peter asks a question on John's behalf, from which he hopes John will benefit.

By contrast, modern biblical interpreters tend to read Peter's question (psychologically) as an impertinently nosy one, which receives a rebuke in Jesus's *ti pros se* ('What is that to you?').

In the spirit of Ochs's book, I read the exchange as a lesson in the right sort of 'not knowing', and (thus) as an endorsement of Ochs's wisdom about religious peacemaking. This requires us, for present purposes, to read the otherness of John from Peter as analogous to the otherness of one scriptural tradition from another. Peter's question seems to me to seek to map a comparison. The divine word has allowed him to determine a meaning with imperative force for him. But what, he wonders, of other interpreters and other possible manifestations of the divine will? How is the truth of his own commissioning by Jesus to be measured and evaluated against the truths that might or might not be vouchsafed to others?

The reply 'What is that to you?' may indeed involve an element of rebuke, for this desire to map is problematic. The path of discipleship requires the disciple to eschew the sidelong glance—the sort of resentful glance we may imagine passing between the workers in the vineyard in Jesus's

<sup>8</sup> 'This does not mean that the words are necessarily confusing, only that readers must enter into a more intimate relationship with the words to discover which meaning is active at which time, and in which place and context of reading.' (20).

parable when those who have worked all day find themselves paid the same as those who were hired at the eleventh hour (Matthew 20:1–16). The dynamics of comparison are as old as the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4). They readily play out in a logic of competition which is often barely-concealed, even (paradoxically) when dressed up as an apparent desire for equality of treatment.

Such a logic will not serve religious coexistence. But there is more than rebuke in Jesus's response. There is repair. Peter is deflected from a logic of binary comparison as he is deflected from the hubris of wanting to know what the voice that has called him along a particular path is saying to everyone else. To repurpose Ochs's words, he is asked to embrace the sort of logic whereby '[i]f another interpreter [alights on] a different meaning' this need not 'contradict the first one, but simply differ from it' (40). Jesus's 'What is that to you?' enjoins him to an 'unknowing' that—in its opening up of a more multi-valued world of interpretation, which we participate in reciprocally rather than grasping individually—leads to a different 'activity of knowing' (113). Peter, Jesus says, has 'knowledge enough' (115) to do the thing that is asked of *him*, and 'unknowledge enough' (my coinage) to trust that others will have their own relation with the Absolute in whom all relations subsist. That other things are asked of others (and that they too are participants in the one world which is under the shared regard of this 'Absolute', who is also 'Redeemer' (30)) requires us, like Peter as he looks back at John, to value them—for there are scriptural reasons why we should do so (scriptural traditions give an answer to the question 'why value anything rather than nothing?': we are all creatures of God, and all stand before the face of God). But, like Peter as he looks back at John, we are not to try to 'map' our truth onto that of others as though from some overarching vantage point, or weigh it against theirs with some uniform set of measurements. We, like Peter, are called to a 'second species of "truth"', in Ochs's words: 'This is truth as *emet*, a Hebrew term derived from the root *amn*, connoting "faithfulness"' (41).

'Follow me' (*su moi akolouthei*), says Jesus to Peter, or (in a closer rendition of the Greek) 'Do thou keep on following me'. In other words, 'say "Amen" (affirm the faithfulness) that you have discovered in your intimacy with the divine word', and have the humility and generosity to expect to find it in other scriptural traditions without knowing exactly what form it will take. Others will have their own Amens to say. To recognize this (and to embody it in a practice like Scriptural Reasoning) is to take what is a deeply significant step towards the achievement of religious relations without violence, for 'the faithfulness that joins each SR reader to the plain sense of Scripture' is (so Ochs proposes) the same faithfulness that 'joins each SR scholar to every other' (41).